

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES ARMY ALASKA**



ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**CONVERSION OF THE AIRBORNE TASK FORCE TO AN
AIRBORNE BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM**

FORT RICHARDSON, ALASKA



September 2005

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES ARMY GARRISON, ALASKA

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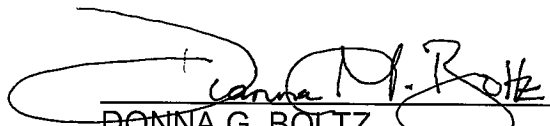
Prepared By:

Colorado State University
Center for Environmental Management of Military Lands
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1490

Reviewed By:

Environmental Department
Directorate of Public Works
U.S. Army Garrison, Alaska

Approved By:



DONNA G. BOLTZ
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commanding

30 Sept 05

Date

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DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

United States Army Alaska, Conversion of the Airborne Task Force to an Airborne Brigade Combat Team, Fort Richardson, Alaska

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider potential environmental impacts prior to undertaking a course of action. Within the Department of the Army, NEPA is implemented through regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality [40 CFR Parts 1500 – 1508], with supplemental guidance provided by Army NEPA regulations [32 CFR Part 651]. In February 2004, U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK) published a final environmental impact statement (EIS) setting forth its comprehensive evaluation of environmental impacts associated with the transformation of USARAK airborne and light infantry forces. In 27 May 2004, a Record of Decision was issued by Army officials authorizing transformation of the 1-501st Parachute Infantry Regiment into an Airborne Task Force and the 172nd Infantry Brigade (Separate) into a Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

Subsequent to the 2004 environmental analysis, Department of Army officials have proposed the permanent conversion of the 1-501st Airborne Task Force (ATF) into a larger Airborne Brigade Combat Team (BCT). Because the proposed conversion of the ATF to an Airborne BCT represents changes to the USARAK airborne force structure that was considered in the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS*, federal NEPA regulations obligate Army officials to consider the potential environmental impacts of this change to force structure and to determine whether the proposed change represents significant new impacts, criteria, or circumstances relevant to the environmental considerations evaluated within the 2004 EIS. To assist Army decision-makers in this comparative analysis, USAGAK prepared an environmental assessment (EA) which considered the potential environmental impacts of converting the existing ATF to a larger Airborne BCT. This EA provides the decision maker with the information necessary to evaluate the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the proposed action as directed by the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA implementing regulations. The task for the decision-maker is to determine whether the additional impacts associated with converting the ATF into an Airborne BCT represent sufficiently significant new environmental impacts or information to require supplementation of the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS*.

Description of Action: USARAK proposes to convert the ATF currently located at Fort Richardson to an Airborne BCT. This action will involve the stationing of approximately 2,400 additional personnel at Fort Richardson and the additional construction of new facilities to support the stationing increase. Additional new structures include brigade, battalion, and company headquarters facilities; classroom; storage complex; Soldiers' barracks; vehicle maintenance shop; dining facility; heavy drop rigging facility; medical clinic; and an airborne sustainment and operations complex.

Airborne unit training activities will increase at Fort Richardson, Fort Wainwright (including Tanana Flats Training Area and Yukon Training Area), and Donnelly Training Area. Maneuver impact miles and maneuver training space will increase by 200% with the conversion of the 1-501st ATF to an Airborne BCT.

Decision: USARAK officials must decide whether to maintain the airborne unit as a Task Force (Alternative 1/No Action Alternative) or to convert the ATF to an Airborne BCT (Alternative 2) as proposed. If USARAK officials decide to undertake the proposed action, Army officials must decide whether the conversion of the ATF to an Airborne BCT represents sufficiently significant new environmental impacts or information to warrant supplementation of the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS*.

Procedure: Analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with each alternative action is set forth in the *U.S. Army Alaska Conversion of the Airborne Task Force to an Airborne Brigade Combat Team Environmental Assessment*. The findings of this EA are incorporated into this draft decision document. Potential issues were determined to be relevant if they fell within the scope of the proposed action, if they suggested different actions, or if they influenced the decision on the proposed action.

Public comments are welcome up to 30 days following public announcement of the EA. Comments will be recorded in the Administrative Record, and relevant comments or concerns may be incorporated into the Final Finding of No Significant Impact and associated EA.

Environmental Impacts: Under Alternative 2, minor temporary impacts will result from construction of Airborne BCT facilities at Fort Richardson. These include fugitive dust, soil erosion, sedimentation, and noise. Long-term impacts from construction of additional facilities and stationing of additional personnel include the development of approximately 60 acres of vegetated land; a minor increase in air emissions from added stationary sources; and a minor increase in electricity, fuel, and water consumption. Construction activities and the additional personnel assigned to Fort Richardson would result in beneficial socioeconomic impacts for the Anchorage area.

Impacts to USARAK training lands as a consequence of the additional training represented by Alternative 2 would include long-term minor impacts to air quality, water resources, vegetation, and wildlife and fisheries. Increased training would have moderate impacts to soil resources in localized areas. Aircraft noise levels would not increase, but increased use of aircraft could have moderate impacts in training lands due to increased frequency of aircraft use.

Mitigation Measures: Facility construction would adhere to state and federal storm water management policy. Training activities will comply with those mitigation measures set forth in the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS*. Training lands will be managed in accordance with the standards and procedures stipulated in the 2004 EIS and the *USARAK Integrated Training Area Management Plan*.

Conclusion: USARAK has chosen Alternative 2 (Convert Airborne Task Force to an Airborne Brigade Combat Team) as its intended course of action. Based on a review of the information contained in this EA, USARAK has determined that the environmental impacts associated with the conversion of the ATF to an Airborne BCT are not significant. In addition, USARAK officials have concluded that when compared to the environmental impacts evaluated in the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS*, the activities and environmental impacts associated with conversion of the existing ATF to an Airborne BCT do not represent significantly new circumstances, nor constitute sufficient environmental impact in degree or kind, to warrant supplementation of the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS*.

Point of Contact: Requests for further information should be directed to Carrie McEnteer, U.S. Army Garrison, Alaska NEPA Coordinator, APVR-WPW, 1060 Gaffney Rd #6500, Fort Wainwright, AK 99703; (907) 353-9507; carrie.barta@us.army.mil.

Approved by:


DONNA G. BOLTZ
Colonel, U.S. Army
Commanding


Date

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFB	Air Force Base
ATF	Airborne Task Force
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
CAA	Clean Air Act
DTA	Donnelly Training Area
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
HMMWV	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle
MIM	Maneuver Impact Mile
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
TFTA	Tanana Flats Training Area
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
USAGAK	U.S. Army Garrison Alaska
USARAK	U.S. Army Alaska
YTA	Yukon Training Area